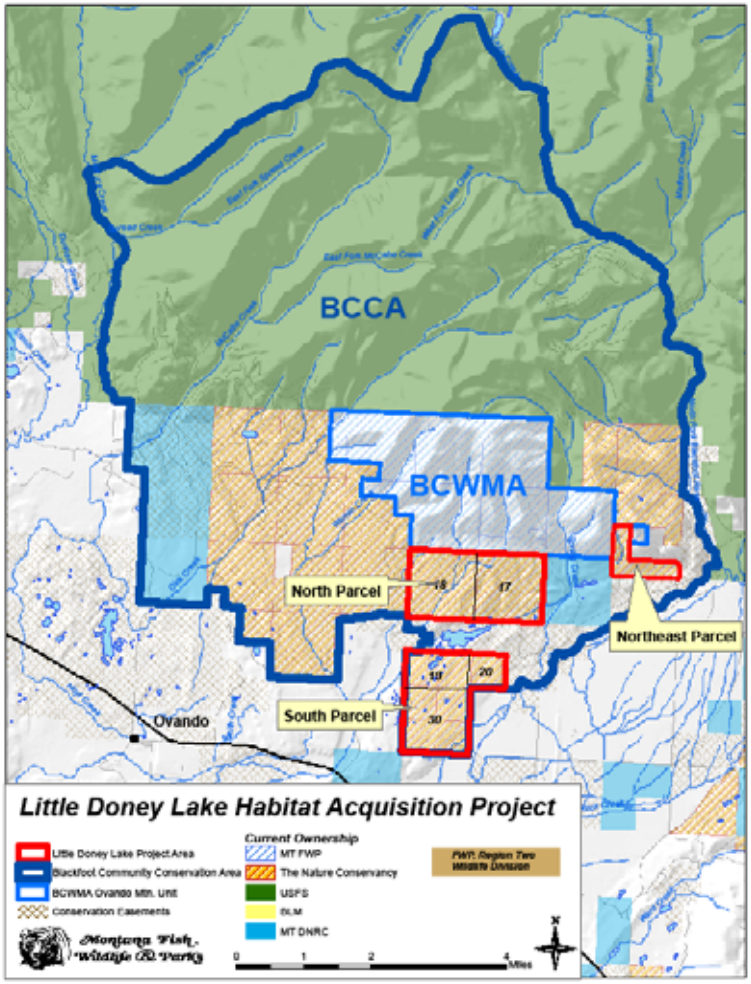
Appendix A: Little Doney Lake Fee-Title Acquisition
DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

FWP would acquire fee-title to the Little Doney Lake properties from The Nature Conservancy (TNC). FWP's purpose for acquiring the properties would be to preserve and protect the conservation values of the land, particularly the habitat the land provides for a variety of wildlife species. Upon their acquisition, these properties would be folded into the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA).



The properties were owned by Plum Creek Timber Company from the early 1990s through 2006 and were managed for commercial timber production. Livestock grazing has been part of the historic land-use practices, although not for the past several years. The properties are highly valued as part of a public hunting area, and have been an important part of the Ovando Mountain Block Management Area (administered by FWP on behalf of several cooperating landowners) since 1990.

This draft management plan outlines FWP's strategies for meeting the obligations it would accept as part of the cost of acquiring the subject lands. After revising this draft plan to reflect public review and comment, the final version will serve as an amendment to the existing comprehensive management plan for the BCWMA (revised 1989).

AREA DESCRIPTION

The Little Doney Lake blocks of parcels, proposed for fee-title acquisition, will be known as South, North, and Northeast blocks (red-outlined and labeled on map). These properties are located in north Powell County, about 4.5-8 miles ENE of Ovando, at the base of Ovando Mountain. Elevations range from 3,900 to 5,800 feet across approximately 2,623 acres. The

landform generally is a bench intersected by northeast-southwest running draws, although the eastern-most block of parcels contains steep slopes on the southeast corner of Ovando Mountain. The principal wetland feature is Little Doney Lake, among other dry or seasonally wet potholes. The properties are principally forested with ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch in the uplands, and spruce in the lowlands. The forest has been commercially harvested over multiple entries, leaving mature timber, snags, and regeneration in a clumped and erratic distribution. Aspen is present throughout. The understory is a mix of rough fescue, elk sedge, serviceberry, snowberry, and willow. Spotted knapweed is the main noxious weed problem at present.

The Little Doney Lake properties are part of the fall-winter-spring range for about 500 elk and about 200 white-tailed deer and 200 mule deer. In addition to ruffed and blue grouse, black bear, mountain lion, coyote, moose and wolf, these parcels are also important occupied habitat for grizzly bear and waterfowl (including trumpeter swans), owing in part to the wetlands and associated broad riparian areas near the North Fork of the Blackfoot. One of very few common loon nest sites in the Blackfoot watershed exists on Little Doney Lake.

ENCUMBRANCES

The South block of parcels would be encumbered with a perpetual conservation easement to be held by FWP. This would allow FWP the option of exchanging its title to the underlying fee at some future date, while still perpetuating the habitat and access values of the property under different ownership. If such an exchange or other land transaction were seriously contemplated in the future, it would require full public participation under the Montana Environmental Policy Act and FWP statutes.

The North block of parcels is already encumbered with a perpetual conservation easement held by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). This USFWS easement does not guarantee public access.

The Northeast block of parcels is not presently encumbered with a conservation easement.

In the South and North blocks, where conservation easements would be in place, FWP's land and access management would be carried out to fully meet or exceed the standards set forth in either conservation easement.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The subject lands would be managed in a manner consistent with direction provided in the BCWMA comprehensive management plan (revised 1989), noxious weed management plan (1992), plan for entering into cooperative management agreements with private landowners (i.e., livestock grazing, 1996), management plan for the West Slope of Boyd Mountain (856 acres purchased from Plum Creek, 1999), and management plan for the Blackfoot-Clearwater Conservation Easement with DNRC (6,850 acres, 2004). Compared to the current situation, with the subject lands under TNC ownership, there would be little or no change in the management of public access and livestock grazing. Compared with current conditions, efforts to control noxious weeds would be maintained on roadsides and in key, nonforested foraging areas for deer and elk. Forest management would shift from an historic emphasis on commercial timber

production to an emphasis on providing forested forage and cover for a diversity of native wildlife, including Tier One species under the Montana Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

Objectives

I: Manage for the maximum sustainable utilization of the winter range by elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer within the following standards:

- Soil condition and development will be maintained or enhanced;
- Adverse impacts to adjacent landowners will be reduced or mitigated;
- The condition of elk and deer populations will be maintained or enhanced;
- Elk and deer populations will be supported by natural winter forage;
- Adverse impacts on other resources such as fisheries, riparian habitats, water quality, native plant communities, and other animal populations will be avoided or mitigated. Opportunities to enhance these resources will be pursued when compatible with elk and deer management (as time and funding allow).

II: Maximize public access and recreation opportunities within the following standards:

- Other WMA objectives (i.e., wildlife) will not be compromised;
- Diverse opportunities for appreciation and enjoyment by the public will be maintained. Recreation opportunities include hunting, fishing, trapping, touring, camping, picnicking, hiking, bike-riding and horseback riding.

Blackfoot Community Conservation Area

The BCCA is a 41,000-acre area within which FWP, the USFS, the USFWS, MT DNRC, the Blackfoot Challenge, and private landowners have agreed (through the adoption of a MOU) to cooperatively manage their lands for mutual benefit. A 15-member council of agency representatives and stakeholders meets monthly to share ideas, leverage resources, and to develop joint projects. Public agencies' autonomy and management authority are not diminished by their participation; however, by working together, all partners benefit. Specifically, FWP is able to ensure that wildlife habitat, recreational access, and landscape level conservation priorities are strongly considered well beyond the borders of its ownership within the BCCA. If the BCCA continues to succeed, it may prove to be a model that can be applied across larger Montana landscapes.

The Little Doney Lake properties would continue to be included within the BCCA, and managed by FWP in a manner that not only features wildlife habitat on FWP properties, but also fosters cooperative habitat improvements for wildlife on the larger landscape.

Public Access:

The subject lands lie within the current boundaries of FWP Hunting District (HD) 285 and would be added to the BCWMA. All BCWMA lands within HD 285, including the subject lands, would continue to be closed to all public motorized entry between 4/1 and 11/30. Winter snowmobile use is currently permitted but could be managed or restricted in the future as deemed necessary by FWP to protect wildlife habitat values. All lands would be open to non-motorized travel yearlong.

- Overnight camping is allowed. Camps may be maintained on the BCWMA for a maximum of 14 days in any 30-day period.

- Do not block roads or gates.

- No removal of firewood from the BCWMA.

- Permits required for groups of over 30 people.

- Leave no trace of campfires, hitching rails, shooting targets or other litter.

The Little Doney Lake parcels have been an integral part of the Ovando Mountain Block Management Area since 1990. This is one of the most heavily used BMAs in Region 2, hosting more than >2000 hunter days in 2007 alone. All three parcels provide important recreational access, and would remain as part of the Block Management Area.

Project lands are heavily used during summer by hikers and horsemen due to their natural beauty, gentle terrain, and ready county road access. The BCCA Council has worked with the local snowmobile and dog sled clubs to relocate a winter-use trail that crossed a portion of the Little Doney parcel. An alternate route has been identified and will be adopted when construction of a seasonal bridge is complete.

Livestock grazing:
FWP would continue to exclude livestock from the Little Doney Lake properties until such time as a cooperative grazing plan might be agreed upon to benefit wildlife. The process for arriving at such a grazing plan would include collaboration with the Advisory Council for the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area (BCCA), of which FWP and the Little Doney Lake properties would remain a part. In addition to this local level of public involvement, a separate EA under MEPA would be prepared at such time as FWP might seriously explore the option of prescribing livestock grazing to benefit wildlife habitat.

Noxious Weed Control:
Spotted knapweed is the most obvious noxious weed on the subject lands, and is distributed along the road system and on steep, open slopes. Other noxious weeds are thought to be absent or occur in low densities with limited distributions on the subject lands, but this is speculative in advance of a complete site inventory. FWP's program to control noxious weeds would be consistent with the approach described in the Noxious Weed Management Plan for the BCWMA (1992), and would include measures to prevent weed establishment and spread, as well as chemical and biological control of established infestations.

FWP's first priority will be to document and map all noxious weed occurrences on the subject lands during the first growing season under FWP ownership. Any isolated patches of leafy spurge, Dalmatian toadflax or other early invading species will be eradicated by the most efficient and effective means (e.g., hand-pulling, digging or herbicide spot treatment), depending

on weed species and site limitations. Roadsides will be inspected annually for the purpose of detecting and eradicating any new weed introductions before infestations become established. A strategy will be developed to contain and control the spread of established infestations that are identified in the initial mapping effort, which would probably involve integrated application of chemical and biological controls.

FWP's first priority for herbicide control of spotted knapweed on the subject lands will be to spray roadsides. Considerations for managing risks of public contact with herbicide residues and other environmental issues are addressed in the Noxious Weed Management Plan for the BCWMA (1992).

Roadside spraying and annual inspections (with spot eradications) are important strategies to prevent new weed establishments and spread. As an additional preventive measure, FWP will prohibit all but administrative motorized traffic, and will otherwise avoid disturbance of the soil surface. FWP's habitat priority for the subject lands is to enhance forested forage to improve habitat for a diversity of wildlife. Habitat suitability for establishment of spotted knapweed, sulphur cinquefoil and other noxious weeds will decline as previously harvested forest canopies thicken and expand. FWP will consider opportunities to control spotted knapweed in grassland openings to improve forage for elk and deer as funding and other weed control priorities allow.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

FWP would focus on recruiting forested cover (in the form of large-diameter trees and regeneration thickets) and forested forage (e.g., tree lichen and understory grasses, sedges and shrubs) for elk and mule deer year-round. Mature coniferous canopy will provide nest trees for red-tailed hawk, great horned owl, great gray owl and other birds. Large-diameter snags and standing burned trees provide nesting and foraging habitat for a suite of cavity nesting birds (e.g., pileated woodpecker, black-backed woodpecker) and mammals (e.g., flying squirrel). Large downfall contributes to marten, lynx and small mammal populations, provides forage for black and grizzly bear, and dens for mountain lion. A generally mature forest structure also provides escape cover for elk in hunting season and contributes to holding elk in the hunting area to provide season-long hunting recreation and achieve the desired harvest. Silvicultural practices would tend toward: (1) maintaining and increasing larger-diameter trees (both living and dead) across the properties; (2) maintaining and recruiting a mature forest structure across the majority of acres; (3) allowing habitat diversity within a generally mature forest structure, as may be provided by an interspersion of large trees, regeneration thickets, downfall, natural parks and temporary managed openings; (4) encouraging progression through a natural range of forest successional stages at the stand level, rather than attempting to manage for a static forest; (5) allowing the natural fire regime, as may be mimicked by silviculture, to benefit wildlife populations while managing the risk of large, stand replacement events; and (6) controlling noxious weeds along logging roads, landings and skid trails.

Aspen generally occurs in distinct stands of a few acres in size, scattered across the Little Doney Lake properties. Aspen measurably adds wildlife species richness (particularly among cavity nesting birds and after a fire event) wherever it occurs on the landscape. Silvicultural practices would tend to maintain and enhance aspen as a significant habitat component across the Little

Doney Lake properties by: (1) cutting aspen in some cases to stimulate resprouting; (2) removing coniferous competition within and surrounding aspen clones; and (3) avoiding the broadcast usage of herbicides around aspen stands that might kill or suppress aspen (e.g., Tordon).

Diverse, multi-storied forest stands would be recruited around wetlands and riparian areas. Wetland vegetation and riparian vegetation generally would be entirely undisturbed by any future logging, except as may be specifically prescribed by FWP to improve wildlife habitat. Conifer encroachment into sedge and woody shrub types near wetlands and streamsides may be thinned if the effect would be to expand this zone of riparian vegetation. Large snags and downfall would be preserved and recruited around wetland edges and riparian areas. Human disturbance of any type would be minimized around Little Doney Lake from May 1 through August 30 to encourage successful nesting by Common Loon.